

Creation, the Cross & Our Economy

There's a strange mix. What could those three things, creation, the cross and our economy possibly have to do with each other? If you'll stick around for the set-up, I promise that the dots will connect beautifully. You see, each of us was created in the image of our creator—created also to be active participants in God's creation. Said another way, we ourselves were created to be re-creators. We were created to take what God has offered to us, transform it (as participants in Him), and offer it back to Him in praise and thanksgiving...in other words... Eucharistically. In truth, it's a kind of economy. In fact, it is the heavenly standard for economic systems, whereby our main concern is with using the things we encounter in God's creation to glorify Him and to play a part in His love for His handiwork. Each time we participate in any communion service, our priest at the altar reminds us of this, as he thankfully lifts up to heaven in praise what once was wheat and grapes...which has then been recreated into bread and wine...and, most importantly, now reveals also what has become the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here he offers a living testimony of this cooperation of heavenly economy between God and us when he proclaims to our Lord, "Your own from Your own, we offer unto to You on behalf of all and for all."

However, we also, as recipients of and participants in the blessings of the Cross of Christ—in His self-offering of extraordinary love—are furthermore also called to take any brush with the most fallen of creation and to transform that encounter into something beautiful. Thus, in the economy of the cross, we light a candle in the darkness to reveal our Lord's transforming presence. Where there is despair, we enter to offer a restorative hope. Where there is a departure from God, we bring prayer. Where there is hunger, we bring food. Where there is sickness, we bring Christ's healing presence. Where there is loneliness, we go to offer community and communion. Where there is hate, we offer only love. Every experience with darkness is merely a wonderful opportunity to bring Christ's love there through our own self-offering, sacrificial love. This participation in the Cross of Christ is the heart of every Christian's personal economic system, and it is the only one whereby we will find life, as Jesus says, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet ruin or forfeit his very self?" (Luke 9:23-25).

Lately, there has been a lot of talk about the economy and arguments about various economic systems. America's economists, from all sides, are centered upon merely differing ideas of building up consumption for a failing consumerist economy. For many years now, (if you will forgive me for a bit of hyperbole) we have become a nation whose whole way of being is centered upon our consumption of stuff. Consequently, we now have to borrow drastic amounts of money to maintain that same level of consumption. Americans tend to live at a profound level of debt never before experienced. Unfortunately, within any of these economic systems being argued about

here, we are each drawn to live beyond our means because, even during tough economic times, we each experience a gravitational pull towards what we perceive as safety, comfort and security. It is, as Saint Maximos the Confessor says, 'a chasing after the fall of Adam, where we think we can find all of those things outside of God. It mistakenly believes that our dependence, our security, our comfort, and our safety is found in things other than Him and so it's consequence is death.' We continue to miss God's point, that any economy (corporate or personal) which isn't centered upon Jesus Christ and His holy way of self-offering is doomed to take us into the pits of hell. It is the living of a lie, and it is the path to death.

The truth is, it's bad economics to think that we can consume our way into the kingdom of heaven. Remember, that Jesus says, 'We must lose our lives if we want to find them denying ourselves, taking up our cross and following Him.' "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, whoever does not renounce all that he has, cannot be my disciple...For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels" (Luke 9:23- 26). When we put our faith in, find our comfort in, look for security in, and depend upon all the things that we have, then we have simply separated ourselves from God and chosen to live a lie. In other words, for a people who claim to put our faith in God, our actions have ceased to match our words and that leads only to a ruining and a losing of our very selves.

There is a great contemporary Romanian theologian named Father Dumitru Staniloae, who illustrates the bringing together of the two elements of word and action. He wants us to understand the power embedded in personal integrity or holiness of living the heavenly economy of creation and the cross. He uses the example of Saint John the Baptist. He asks, why Herod was so afraid to kill John? Why did Saint John's words matter so much? Everyone else in Judea must have also been saying similar things about Herod's taking up with his brother's wife. But for Herod, it wasn't simply the public nature of what Saint John was saying. It wasn't even the content. It was because of the person who was saying it. Saint John's words mattered because it was Saint John, the holy man of God, who was saying it. Others, even though they may have been saying the same thing, didn't matter, or didn't matter in the same way. Their words lacked power because they were full of lies. They were hypocrites. Their lives lacked integrity of word and deed.

For Saint John the Baptist however, his life reflected that of a holy man. His words had power because there was harmony between what he said and what he did. When he spoke, his words weren't weakened by his sin. Father Staniloae continues, to remind us that conversely, our own words lack power because they are full of lies, full of sin. In the economy of God's Word, however, He is creative. There's a total unity of word with action. Amidst the darkness, the words come forth, "Let there be light...And there is light." (Genesis 1:3) There isn't any discontinuity between what is spoken and what happens. Father Staniloae says that we see a similar thing in the lives and actions of the

saints who have a power and authority that springs from their virtue and integrity—their holiness.

On the 14th of September, we commemorate and venerate the finding of the Cross of Christ by Saints Constantine & Helen. We will gather as a body to process and to praise the cross in our midst as the means of our salvation. Thus, let us pray that our veneration and our words not be a lie...that in matching our action with our words, each one of us may likewise find and take up our own cross this month and beyond...that we will each begin to live personal economies of self-denial and self-offering...and that in so doing, we will find the life that comes from participating in Christ's restorative, re-creating Spirit, so that each of our lives, in truth, also becomes a powerful, loving procession of Christ's cross through the world.

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